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**Title:** Made a statement regarding air strike on Iraq by United Kingdom and United States of America.

1201 hours

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE): Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been closely following the developments relating to Iraq.

India has close historical ties and strong affinities with the countries and the peoples of the region. We have been deeply concerned about the sufferings of the people of Iraq and have called for the lifting of sanctions in tandem with Iraq's compliance with the UN Security Council Resolution. We have consistently counselled restraint and moderation in resolving the differences that have emerged from time to time in the interaction of the UN Special Commission with Iraq.

The Government of India is gravely concerned at and deplore these air strikes being carried out on Iraq by the UK and the US. It is particularly regrettable that this unilateral step has been undertaken at the very time when the UN Security Council was in session to discuss developments arising from the report of the Head of the United Nations Special Commission to Iraq, with the UN SG had forwarded to the Council with his recommendations proposing alternative courses of action.

This attack raises serious questions regarding the functioning of the collective and consultative procedures of the UN Security Council. It also undermines the ability of the Council to verify Iraq's compliance with the relevant Council Resolutions. It has been our considered view that use of force in this situation would be counter-productive. The issue needs to be resolved diplomatically through peaceful means and dialogue. We have supported efforts by the United Nations in this direction.

We have noted the statement of the UN Secretary-General expressing deep regret at the latest development. We call for an immediate halt to the military action and the resumption of diplomatic efforts under the auspices of the United Nations.

The Indian community in Iraq, numbering about fifty persons, is safe. We have been in touch with our Embassy and are taking all measures to ensure their welfare.

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